

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
June 29, 2012

The other night, as I was finishing up my evening walk, a police cruiser pulled up beside me. Sgt. Kevin Donovan was out on patrol and in fact had just cleared a call in the neighborhood. He had been assisting the Fire Department with a medical aid call but took the opportunity to suggest a topic for an upcoming "Watchwords" column. I am always seeking ideas from readers and especially from fellow officers as they encounter scenarios during their course of duty. He noted that emergency responders had difficulty finding a residence because of poor numbering on the home. Fortunately the person was located fairly quickly and everything turned out okay.

It's not only a City Ordinance but something everyone should do; make sure your home is easily identifiable from the road. The street or unit number should be clearly posted and contrast in color, in case emergency responders need to find you quickly. In an emergency, time can be crucial and a few moments could mean the difference between life and death. As shrubbery continues to grow through the summer, take some time to trim any growth obstructing your house numbers. If you reside in a condo or multi-unit building, take a few moments to see how easily you identify the unit number. If you have difficulty, bring your concerns to the property manager or condo association. Although emergency responders have maps, gps and a great working knowledge of the City, any time saved is beneficial. No one knows when an emergency will occur but you can take steps to prepare before one does. Take a few moments today to be sure your home is clearly numbered, in case there is an emergency tomorrow.

As we reach the end of the fiscal year, we're also reaching the end of an era in Amesbury with the retirement of Emergency Management Director Don Swenson. When Don took over from Richard Clark a few years ago, he certainly had big shoes to fill. Don not only filled those shoes but actually made them overflow. Responding to fires, emergency situations, extreme weather conditions and community happenings has become Don's mission and he certainly did a remarkable job, leading the volunteers at the Emergency Management Agency. He has also steered the City through Seabrook Nuclear Drills and compiled an action plan to counter any emergency.

I've been able and fortunate to have worked with Donny on countless community events and truly appreciate his support and dedication. Whenever I asked for help, Donny would be eager to lend a helping hand and always rallied his troops to assist. Events such as the Christmas Parade, Tree Lighting, Halloween Parade, National Night Out, Bike Safety Day, 4th of July fireworks and many others would not have been possible or successful without Donny's help. Quite often, he would call me first upon hearing about an upcoming event, asking if his team could help. Donny and his crew would assist with the events, help control traffic and be available to help with any task. Don also expanded his duties to join the Coffee with the Chiefs hour at the Senior Center, providing emergency preparedness information to residents, sharing stories and answering questions each month. A few months ago he gave a tour of the Emergency Operations Center, much to the delight of several seniors, who were truly impressed with the entire program.

I'll truly miss working with Donny but wish him the best as he moves on to a new chapter in his life. He has earned some time to relax, but I imagine he'll still keep tuned into what's happening in the emergency department. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Don for his support and leadership over the past years; he really is someone who has made our community a safer and better place. I truly appreciate all the support he gave, assuring Amesbury residents and visitors were safe as they went about their daily business. Thanks Donny and best wishes for a long and healthy retirement.